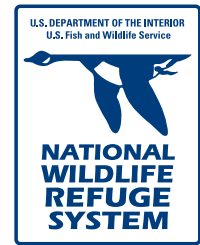


News Release

National Wildlife Refuge System



Pacific Islands External Affairs Office
300 Ala Moana Blvd., Room 5-311, Box 50187
Honolulu, Hawaii 96850

For release: July 21, 2005
Contact: Barbara Maxfield, 808 792 9531 or 753 0440

PIEA-05-18
05-061

Midway Atoll Key to Removal of Shipwreck

National Wildlife Refuge in the Midst of Activity Again

A small, 5-mile wide atoll in the midst of the Pacific has traditionally played a significant role in the nation's communications, military, and air and sea transportation history. During the past several years, the atoll has adapted to its more peaceful role as a National Wildlife Refuge and National Memorial to the Battle of Midway, where wildlife outnumber humans by a ratio of more than 50,000 to 1. But over the past few weeks, Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge once again has become strategically important because of its central location in the Pacific.

On July 2, the 145-foot motor vessel *Casitas* ran aground at Pearl and Hermes Atoll, Midway's neighbor to the east and part of the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge. Since that time, Midway has served as a gathering point and logistical support base for the numerous responding agencies and contractors trying to extract the vessel from the coral reef.

"I can't say it hasn't strained our resources," said Barry Stieglitz, project leader for Pacific Island refuges. "We've had people working around the clock and 7 days a week, but we're pleased to be able to help. I particularly want to give credit to our Midway contractor, Chugach McKinley, Inc., whose employees are giving their all right alongside my staff."

Midway welcomed the crew and workers from the *Casitas* when they were rescued from Pearl and Hermes Atoll by the NOAA vessel *Oscar Elton Sette*. The U.S. Coast Guard later returned them to Honolulu by air. The Coast Guard Cutter *Walnut*, Coast Guard C-130 aircraft, and American Marine Corporation's motor vessels *American Quest* and *American Contender* and its 240-foot barge have used Midway as a staging area in recent days. The *American Emerald* with its 140-foot barge arrived at Midway yesterday morning, and the motor vessel *Condor* is scheduled to arrive at Midway today. The crews will spend the next few days preparing for the effort to move the *Casitas*.

In the midst of the *Casitas* activity, the Coast Guard has visited Midway for two emergency medical evacuations, one assisted by the *American Contender*. The Coast Guard Cutter *Jarvis* will also be stopping at Midway en route to Honolulu from Alaska. Midway is also preparing for its construction season, the only time large-scale projects can be accomplished on the island without impacting nesting seabirds.

— more —

Working with others, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service conserves, protects, and enhances fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

About 40 people live and work on Midway, mostly Chugach McKinley employees plus 4 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service personnel. They maintain Henderson Airfield as an emergency diversion site for commercial twin-engine aircraft crossing the Pacific; manage and protect habitat for millions of migratory seabirds and shorebirds, endangered Hawaiian monk seals and Laysan ducks, threatened green sea turtles, and other native wildlife; protect about 87,500 acres of significant coral reefs; and maintain and operate the infrastructure of a small town.

“I have a feeling Midway will always be a key site in the midst of the Pacific,” Stieglitz said. “Midway has a long and illustrious history as a connecting point for the first round-the-world communications cable, the cross-Pacific Pan American flying clippers, the famous Battle of Midway, and the Cold War. During all this time, it has also remained a safe haven for huge numbers of wildlife. Our goal – and our challenge – is to maintain that historic role.”